



## Fact Sheet:



# Facts and Figures On Youth Heroin Use

## Highlights

- Heroin is an illegal, highly addictive narcotic derived from the opium poppy.
- Users appear tired, drowsy, or drunk rather than energetic or hyperactive as with a stimulant.
- Most of the heroin in California is Mexican black tar heroin, so called because of its sticky, black consistency.
- The purity of black tar heroin usually ranges from 30 to 80 percent. The national average for heroin purity is about 40 percent.
- Overdosing is common with heroin use and often leads to death.
- The long-range health consequences of chronic heroin use include addiction, collapsed veins, infection of the heart lining and valves, abscesses, cellulitis, and liver disease.
- Injection users are in danger of contracting HIV, Hepatitis B and C, and necrotising fasciitis, a flesh-eating bacteria, every time they use heroin.

## History

- Historical references indicate the opium poppy was cultivated in lower Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) as early

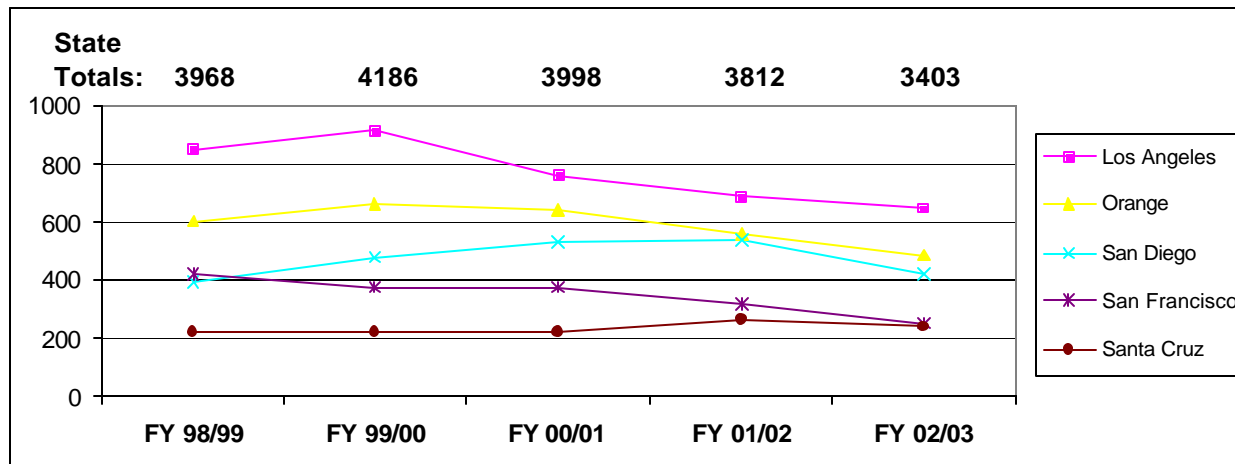
as 3400 B.C. The Sumerians referred to it as Hul Gil (joy plant).

- In 1874, opium smoking was banned in San Francisco, except for the opium dens in Chinatown.
- A generation ago, the heroin available in the U.S. was barely five percent pure and only a small percentage of young people used it because it had to be injected with a needle.

## National Trends

- The average age for heroin users in the United States declined from 27.4 years in 1988 to 17.6 years in 1997 and use among females increased dramatically.
- There is evidence that young users are smoking or inhaling heroin, rather than injecting the drug. This is attributed to increased purity and a misconception that these methods are safer and less addictive than injecting.
- However, by 2000, almost two-thirds (63 percent) of new heroin users ages 18-24 reported injection as the route of administration for heroin.

This chart shows heroin treatment admissions for individuals ages 25 and under in selected California counties, as well as the state totals listed at the top. The counties were selected based on the significant numbers of youth and adolescents admitted for heroin use in the last five years.



The **Drug Abuse Warning Network**, (DAWN) is a national surveillance system that monitors trends in drug-related emergency department visits and deaths in 21 cities nationwide, including Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco in California.

### National Data

- Adolescent (12-17 year old) heroin users are showing up in heroin-related emergency room contacts. DAWN reported that 396 adolescents were reported in heroin-related emergency room visits in 1995. By 2002, 813 adolescents were reported in heroin-related emergency room visits
- The largest increase in heroin-related emergency room visits occurred in 18 and 19 year olds, a more than 200 percent increase between 1995 and 2002. The number of heroin-related emergency room visits from the 18-25 year old age group almost doubled, while the 35 and older age group increased 38-percent during those years.
- Emergency room visits by heroin users in San Francisco County were very high in 1995 with 3,113 mentions. This figure has fluctuated through the years, but was down slightly to 2,672 in 2002.
- Los Angeles County emergency room visits by heroin users also fluctuated between 1995 and 2002, but did not change significantly.
- In San Diego County, total emergency room heroin mentions peaked in 1999, then declined to 708 mentions in 2002. However, mentions for 18-25 year olds increased 158 percent in the same seven-year period.
- The 2001-2002 California Student Survey reports that about two percent of 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders used heroin in the previous six months.

### California Data